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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: IRANIAN-SUPPORTED GROUP SAID TARGETING SISTANI AIDES, WOULD
CONFRONT U.S. IF MALIKI REMOVED

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CLASSIFIED BY: Charles F. Hunter, Babil PRT Leader, REO
Al-Hillah, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Babil cable.

¶2. (S) Summary: A civil society activist with strong religious credentials recently warned PRT leader that an Iranian-controlled group called Asa'ib Al-Haq, based in Diwaniya, is serving as a tool in Iran's efforts to take control of the hawza, the Shi'a religious establishment in Najaf. This same group would be a proxy for Iran and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq in an "open war" to be implemented gradually against the U.S. in the event of any attempt to change the Maliki government. On the political front he urged action with the Council of Representatives and via cultivation of tribal sheikhs in currently peaceful areas to close them off to further Iranian inroads. End summary.

¶3. (C) Hayder Hassan Abboud, aka Abu Al-Hassan Al-Diwani, contacted PRT leader by e-mail in late May to request a meeting to pass along information he said came mainly from one Zeyad Al-Musawi (NFI), someone with Sufi leanings to whom he referred as his "spiritual master." Unlike at the first meeting, which took place at the Regional Embassy Office on May 19, Abu Al-Hassan eschewed the turbaned garb of a cleric for the `agal of a sheikh when meeting PRT leader at the RTI compound for a second face-to-face encounter on May 31. Abu Al-Hassan leads the Akad Cultural Institute and has ties with Sayyid Farqad Al-Qazwini dating back to Iraq's liberation (see bio note para 9).

ASA'IB AL-HAQ: IRANIAN/ISCI PROXY

¶4. (S) Abu Al-Hassan described a group called Asa'ib (or Kata'ib) Al-Haq, run by Iran's Quds Force and linked with the Badr military wing of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI, formerly SCIRI), that would serve as ISCI's proxy in what he says is the overt conflict ISCI cannot afford to wage with the U.S. Jaysh Al-Mahdi (JAM) could also partner with Asa'ib Al-Haq in this effort, he suggested. Abu Al-Hassan reported that Asa'ib Al-Haq is based in Diwaniya province and at present numbers some 50 men led by Yahya Qa'ush and another known as Abu Du'a. However the group and its Iranian handlers are ultimately loyal to Ayatollah Kadhun Hussein Al-Ha'iri in Qum, whom Abu Al-Hassan termed (despite Al-Ha'iri's close ties to Muqtada Al-Sadr's father) the "true successor" of SCIRI founder Mohammed Baqer Al-Hakim. Abu Al-Hassan asserted that Al-Ha'iri has issued a fatwa authorizing jihad against the U.S., a ruling

seconded by Ahmed Al-Baghdadi (NFI) in Lebanon.

15. (S) According to Abu Al-Hassan's information, Asa'ib Al-Haq would gradually undertake an "open war" against the U.S. should there be any attempt to remove Nuri Al-Maliki as prime minister. He said that a rumor is circulating that the U.S. is indeed attempting to foment a coup against Maliki; ISCI informants present at a meeting earlier this year at offices of the International Republican Institute in Baghdad where the idea of an anti-Maliki movement was allegedly discussed are source of this tale.

TARGETING SISTANI'S INNER CIRCLE

16. (S) Meantime, Abu Al-Hassan declared, Asa'ib Al-Haq would set about furthering Iran's attempt to gain control of the hawza, where he himself had studied. Iran realizes that the only sure way of establishing long-term dominance in Iraq's Shi'a provinces is to seize the spiritual and temporal power the hawza represents. As a first step in doing so, the group plans to begin assassinating supporters of Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani in Najaf and Diwaniya. (Note: News agencies reported on June 6 the killing of a Sistani aide named Sheikh Rahim Al-Hasnawi by three unknown gunmen in Najaf. End note.) This campaign may draw on information collected by the many taxi drivers in Najaf who work for the itala'at (Iranian intelligence), according to Abu Al-Hassan.

U.S. SHOULD FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE

17. (S) Abu Al-Hassan, who said he had provided substantially similar information to American sources (whom he declined to name) more than a year ago, urged the U.S. to fight fire with fire. "The best way to influence the Shi'a is through the

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Shi'a," in his words. He advised a "carrot and stick" approach to the Council of Representatives, particularly by encouraging the Da'wa party to leave the United Iraqi Alliance and thereby present a real alternative to ISCI for authentically patriotic Iraqis. He also urged that the U.S. not ignore tribal leaders in peaceful southern regions. Maliki needs their support, in his analysis, but these sheikhs understand that he has nothing to offer them because of being consumed with problems elsewhere. If Iran appears to be the better bet for preserving the social status they enjoy through dispensing favors, they will not hesitate to make that wager.

COMMENT

18. (S) Abu Al-Hassan did not have an explicit agenda beyond hoping for support ("culturally, not materially") for the institute he runs in Al-Hillah. Direct and open in speech, he proudly affirms that even with having taught Arabic and introduction to philosophy at the hawza, he is open to other paths to truth beyond those of the "people of the book." In his initial meeting with PRT leader and again in this latest discussion, he offered to speak with "anyone, any time" for the sake of forestalling what he fears is the disastrous deepening of Iran's influence in southern Iraq. At a minimum, if the assassination of Sheikh Al-Hasnawi is more than a coincidence, his predictions about Asa'ib Al-Haq's modus operandi may be worth taking seriously. End Comment.

BIO NOTE

19. (C) Haydar Hassan Abboud, aka Abu Al-Hassan Al-Diwani, was born in Diwaniya on September 6, 1970. He received a B.S.

(1993) and master's degree (2002) in chemical engineering from the University of Baghdad, and also holds a bachelor's in law from the same university (2006). In 1991 he began studying at the hawza in Najaf. In 1994 he was arrested for anti-Saddam writings and refusing to serve in the army; after his release at the end of 1995 he taught secondary school and resumed his hawza studies. In the past he was a close associate of Sayyid Farqad Al-Qazwini of the Democratic Iraqi Gathering, of which Abu Al-Hassan was a founding member and remains a vice president. He also was the founding dean of Qazwini's Hillah University in 2003 and taught philosophy and religion there until 2005 when he opened the Akad Cultural Institute (www.akadci.org). He is an alumnus of the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program.

HUNTER